Philosophy of Education

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**Introduction**

As the mother of a special needs child with intellectual disability, I have navigated my way through the special education system, and I have spent many years with a focus on my daughter’s learning and quality of life. I have met many great teachers and paraprofessionals along the way whom have made great efforts to ensure that my child receives the best educational experience possible. In addition to these factors, my extensive personal educational endeavors—including my teacher-preparation courses—have created a love for learning and an understanding of how children learn differently and the difficulties they encounter. I hold a B.S. in Accounting and a Masters of Accountancy, and I have worked for several years in public accounting, but my deep interest in education has helped me to gain the courage to change professional courses. My career in public accounting has helped me to develop strong professional responsibility, integrity and a personal focus on ethical behavior and helping others, and I am ready to transfer these qualities to my future career in teaching children.

**I. Professionalism**

Our society is one led by the people, and the intellectual ability of the people is very important. Schools are the traditional means in America by which children are educated in fundamental subjects that will give them a better grasp on the world and a brighter future as adults. This education may lead them to higher education of college or university work that can prepare them for careers that may better enable them to support themselves, to hopefully obtain fulfillment in their lives, and to be strong members of our democratic society. Therefore, as a teacher, I will embrace the many types of diversity in the classroom (e.g., gender, race, learning ability, personality, etc…) and strive to reach all students so that each one may develop into culturally sensitive, educated adults who will make positive contributions to their communities.
II. Diversity

Historically, the American education system has been biased in many ways, and one significant issue is race. In *Improving Race Relations in Schools*, Banks said that theory and curriculum could be used to improve racial relations, and he maintained that, without proper diversity education in the school curriculum, race relations would continue to be a significant problem in American schools (Banks, 2006). Also related to race, another common form of diversity in the classroom is socioeconomic status. In an empirical research study conducted by Wickrama, Simons and Baltimore (2012), they stated that “education has a direct effect on young adults’ socioeconomic achievement and moderating influences on the association between socioeconomic context and young adult achievement” (p.1484). They found that, “young adults’ educational level buffers the detrimental influence on early adversities” (p.1484), and they stated that this may be because attainment of higher educational levels increases problem-solving abilities and access to social supports that help students rise above their socioeconomic conditions (p.1485).

There are many other types of diversity in our schools, and regardless of the differences among students, the goal in the classroom is for the teacher to help the children connect to the subject matter so that they may learn and retain the information. A teacher must be sensitive to multiculturalism and be able to differentiate her instruction to reach different students. Technology, media, literature and music are tools I will use to engage students in multicultural education. For children with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, I may seek outside assistance from those trained to teach children with the particular issue, or I may invest in additional professional education. Additionally, I believe it is important to strive to be objective and to keep my personal beliefs in a neutral position in the classroom. It is not the teacher’s role to judge a
child for his or her apparent or expressed beliefs regarding sometimes controversial issues such as religion, politics, sexual or gender identity, or sexual preference. Teachers, to the best of their abilities, must give all students, no matter the type of diversity exhibited, an equal learning opportunity. This does not mean all students will be treated in identical ways; rather, it means that teachers will strive for positive outcomes using many methods to reach diverse students.

III. Curriculum

A child’s proper development rests upon the ability of his or her parents, teachers and community to provide quality learning experiences, social experiences, physical activity, and an overall environment that is conducive to learning. Schools should provide a safe environment that facilitates learning and an appropriate curriculum that will provide necessary knowledge and skills to students such that they may go on after graduation to be successful adults. A well-balanced curriculum includes not only the academic subjects that are required in public schools, but also the implicit curriculum (e.g., implied preferred behaviors) and extracurricular activities. All forms of curriculum must be developmentally appropriate to the students at each grade level; children who are below grade level should be identified, and their needs should be addressed so that they will not be overlooked and allowed to fall further behind.

IV. Classroom Management

My goal for classroom management is to create a safe, inviting and cooperative classroom environment in which students will productively work both together and as individuals. I believe that student engagement is an important tool for minimizing disruptive behaviors, and engagement will be a primary focus in my classroom. I will express my expectations of appropriate behavior through consistent modeling, verbal reiteration and a display of a short list of classroom rules. In situations where students are misbehaving, my goal
will be to maintain a positive attitude; I have learned that often children are more receptive to a positive approach; embarrassment and harsh words produce poor results, while kindness, encouragement and positivity demonstrate the teacher’s concern and allow the students to correct their behaviors without feeling shamed.

V. Teaching Models

Inquiry learning, discovery learning, and discussion are important techniques that I believe should accompany direct instruction. Using these techniques will develop higher-order thinking skills in students and help to ignite students’ interest in learning the subject matter. In addition to using these models, differentiated instruction will be necessary to “meet each child where they are when they enter class and move them forward as far as possible on their educational path” (Levy, 2008, p.162). Examples of ways I will accomplish this goal include various forms of student grouping and the use of tiered lessons that reach students who are above, below or at grade level (Levy, 2008, p.163).

VI. Assessment

As a teacher I will use informal, formative assessments such as asking questions during a lesson, engaging students in discussion, and monitoring their work. This process will help me to determine if additional instruction is needed. Also, I believe it will be useful to use pre-assessments such as a KWL chart (Know/Want to know/Learned) that will tell me where the students are regarding the curriculum for the class (Levy, 2008, p. 162). I will use summative assessments such as projects that require synthesis of the subject matter or demonstration of a process and written tests that include a variety of question types. Tests and other assessments should be valid in that they assess mastery of the learning objectives the teacher used during her class instruction. There should be no mystery, trickery or confusion
involved when writing a test for one’s students, and I will strive for fairness and objectivity in my assessment practices.

**Conclusion**

In terms of specific philosophies of education, I believe existentialism and constructivism most clearly align with my belief system regarding education. These two theories support my views on diversity, curriculum, classroom management and teaching models explained above.

Fitzgerald (2005) explained that adolescence is the period in which individuals initially encounter existential experiences because it is the time when they break free from their parents and other authority figures to attempt to guide their own course in life. Hufford (2010) listed several key concepts of existentialism, including: awareness, becoming, freedom, decision-making, and responsibility (p. 167). Students are each unique, and they are in the process of becoming themselves; this process is made up of the choices they make and the outcomes of those choices (p. 172). I believe that we are all ultimately responsible for our own learning, and as a teacher I want to help students realize their capacity to think critically and make decisions and empower them to take responsibility for their education.

Cooperstein and Kocevar-Weidinger (2004) explained that the constructivist, active learning approach “moves from experience to learning” (p. 141). For example, the instruction period would begin with an activity during which students investigate and participate in inquiry learning instead of direct instruction. Cooperstein and Kocevar-Weidinger stated that the main components of constructivist lessons are that students: construct their own meaning, build on prior knowledge, gain from social interaction, and have learning experiences through authentic, real-world activities (p. 142).
To implement these learning theories in my classroom, I will step away from the traditional dominant-teacher role to become a facilitator for my students as we focus on real-world applications of problems and use inquiry and discovery learning when possible. I believe this approach will enable me to create meaningful learning experiences that will help them to understand the world around them and to think critically and independently.

Teaching is all of the components I have explained above—embracing differences, using appropriate teaching models and assessments to create worthwhile learning experiences that will help students meet academic and life goals, protecting the learning environment through strong classroom management, and making sure that all students are treated equitably. Education changes the world. It promotes understanding of others, discussion, cooperation, acceptance, and so much more, and these qualities make the world a better place to live. Therefore, it is my goal as a teacher to impart the tools of success to all students with whom I come in contact.
Reference List


